



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Resident Canada Geese Populations

What is a Canada goose?

Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*) is a migratory bird native to North America. Currently, 11 subspecies of Canada goose are recognized and range in body size and color. The long black neck, white markings under the chin, and an unmistakable boisterous honk are unique characteristics to this species. The Canada goose traditionally migrates hundreds of miles north to regions of Canada and Alaska during the summer months to breed and raise its young, and relies on a herbivorous diet of aquatic vegetation, grains such as corn and soybean, as well as the leafy portions of many crops.

What are resident Canada geese and how do they differ from other Canada geese?

Most of the 11 subspecies of Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*) are encountered in the lower 48 States only during the fall, winter, and spring, and migrate to the arctic and sub-arctic regions of Canada and Alaska to nest in the summer. Some however, stay in the U.S. year around. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) identifies "resident Canada geese" as those that nest within the lower 48 States in the months of March, April, May or June, and that reside within the lower 48 States in the months of April, May, June, July, and August.

What is the status of resident Canada goose populations?

The Service's best estimate places the total number of resident Canada geese at 3.5 million. Presently, resident Canada goose populations (RPs) in both the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways exceed 1 million birds (having increased an average of 6-14% per year, respectively, over the last ten years) and approaching 1 million birds in the Central Flyway.

Why has their population grown so much that they have become a problem?

A number of factors can be attributed to the rapid rise of RPs. Most resident Canada geese live in temperate climates with relatively stable breeding habitat conditions and low numbers of predators. They tolerate human and other disturbances, have a relative abundance of preferred habitat (especially those located in urban/suburban areas with current landscaping techniques), and fly relatively short distance to winter compared with other Canada goose populations. Additionally, Canada geese, like other geese are long lived birds. This combination of factors contributes to consistently high annual production and survival. The virtual absence of waterfowl hunting in urban areas also provides additional protection to those urban portions of the population. Given these characteristics, most RPs are continuing to increase in both rural and urban areas.

What problems do large RPs cause?

Large RPs can denude grassy areas, including parks, pastures, golf courses, lawns, and other landscaped areas where the grass is kept short and where there are ponds, lakes, and other bodies of water nearby. At airports, resident Canada geese have become a significant safety threat, resulting in dangerous takeoff and landing conditions, costly repairs, and fatal airplane accidents. Excessive goose droppings are also a health concern, and have contributed to the temporary closure of public beaches in several States by local health departments. In addition, agricultural and natural resource damage, including depredation of grain crops, overgrazed pastures and degraded water quality, have increased as RPs have grown.

Are resident Canada geese protected in the U.S.?

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) provides strong measures for the protection and conservation of migratory birds (including resident Canada geese), while at the same time providing opportunities for people to use the resource for sport, recreation, and scientific endeavors. The MBTA also provides considerable flexibility for dealing with situations where birds may come into conflict with human interests, such as those posed by the increasing numbers of resident Canada geese.

What is a draft EIS (DEIS) and why was its preparation necessary?

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required by the National Environmental Policy Act to assess the potential environmental impacts of any proposed major Federal action and to offer reasonable alternatives. Since the purpose of the DEIS is to evaluate alternative strategies to reduce, manage, and control RPs in the continental U.S. and to reduce related damages, any ultimate decision to implement an alternative strategy to manage resident Canada geese constitutes a major Federal action. The DEIS documents this assessment and, together with supporting documents, considerations, data, and public comments, will be used by the Service's Director to prepare a final EIS from which to select the appropriate alternative for implementation.

What would happen to the Canada goose RPs if we did nothing?

With no action, the Service estimates that the RPs in most areas would continue to increase until reaching the carrying capacity of the environment at some time in the future. As the populations grew, the conflicts would grow increasingly unbearable.

What action does the Service propose to address the problem?

In the light of the projected increases in RPs (despite past and current management actions), we believe a much more aggressive management program is warranted and must be implemented. Under the "State Empowerment" alternative, State wildlife management agencies would be provided flexibility to deal with the problems caused by RPs within their respective States. States could choose to implement specific strategies, such as depredation orders on nests and eggs, at airports, at agricultural areas, or at locations where public health may be an issue; expanded hunting opportunities; or other indirect and/or direct population control strategies. We believe the combination of various management strategies would successfully reduce numbers of resident Canada geese to more acceptable levels.

How is the proposed alternative different from the special Canada goose permit? Doesn't the special Canada goose permit give States flexibility to manage resident Canada goose populations?

While the special Canada goose permit is more flexible than the permit-by-permit issuance system and has provided relief in some areas, it has not completely addressed the problem. The objective of the DEIS is to look at long-term approaches and strategies. In the long-term, we believe that more management flexibility will be necessary to meet the needs of the public. Under the proposed alternative, there is no specific requirement for the issuance of a permit or subpermit to anyone authorized to carry out the management or control activities. Further, the alternative allows a State to provide expanded hunter opportunities not available under the special Canada goose permit and authorizes the take of resident Canada geese in August by hunters outside the normal hunting season frameworks of September 1 to March 10.

Why was the proposed action largely limited to situations between April 1 to August 31?

Migratory Canada geese populations interact and overlap with RP Canada geese during the fall and winter. Migratory Canada geese, therefore, could be impacted by management actions and programs targeted at reducing RP during this time. To avoid potential conflicts with other Canada goose populations, most aspects of the proposed alternative are restricted to the period April 1 through August 31 each year. However, some resident Canada geese begin nesting in the early spring, and therefore the proposed alternative does allow the take

of Canada goose nests and eggs during the entire month of March, since any nesting Canada geese in the U.S. would clearly be resident birds.

What effect will the proposed alternative have on RPs?

Resident Canada goose numbers are so abundant (3.5 million) that even with these control measures, the Service estimates they will number approximately 2.1 million a decade from now. These measures may even benefit the population by reducing it to a level that is in better balance with available food and habitat.

How will sport hunting be effected?

Regular hunting season would be largely unaffected under the "State Empowerment" alternative. Most goose population reductions would occur in areas already closed to, or with limited, hunting. The proposed alternative would authorize the creation of a Conservation Order under the authority of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, with the intent to reduce and/or stabilize RPs. States in eligible areas, will be permitted to initiate aggressive resident Canada goose harvest strategies and will enable States to use hunters to harvest resident Canada geese during a period when all other waterfowl and crane hunting seasons, excluding falconry, are closed, inside or outside the migratory bird hunting season frameworks. This Order will provide guidelines for States to expand special seasons and the use of additional hunting methods such as electronic calls, unplugged shotguns, as well as expanded shooting hours.

What assurances are there that States would not over harvest these birds and harm the population?

In addition to required annual breeding surveys, the Service would annually assess the overall impact and effectiveness of the Conservation Order to ensure compatibility with long-term conservation of this resource. If at any time evidence is presented that clearly demonstrates that there no longer exists a serious threat of injury to the area or areas involved for a particular RP, we will initiate action to suspend the Conservation Order; and/or regular-season regulation changes, for that population. Suspension of regulations for a particular population would be made following a public review process.

Aren't non-lethal control techniques effective in reducing conflicts between resident Canada geese and people?

The Service also prefers nonlethal control activities, such as habitat modification, as the first means of eliminating resident

Canada goose conflict/damage problems. However, habitat modification and other harassment tactics do not always work satisfactorily and lethal methods are sometimes necessary to increase the effectiveness of nonlethal management methods. While it is unlikely that all resident Canada goose/human conflicts can be eliminated in all urban settings, implementation of broad-scale resident Canada goose management activities may reduce the likelihood for other management actions, such as large-scale goose round-ups and lethal control.

Would non-lethal control measures still be permitted under the draft EIS?

The State Empowerment alternative does not absolve affected parties from the responsibility of employing non-lethal control techniques. It simply provides additional tools for use in an integrated approach to reducing problems caused by resident Canada geese. We believe that the States and the public should share responsibility for reducing resident Canada goose problems and should promote other activities that exclude or repel resident Canada geese, as well as the use of non-lethal deterrents.

What happens next and can I still comment on the DEIS?

The public comment period ended on May 30. We are currently viewing all of the public comments that were received and will publish a final EIS recommending an alternative sometime in the fall. To obtain a copy of the DEIS, you may contact or write to the Division of Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (703) 1714, or write to the Division of Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, ms 634-ARLSQ, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20240. You can inspect public comments during normal business hours in Room 634- Arlington Square Building, 4401 B, Fairfax Drive, Arlington, Virginia.

Where can I get more information on RP management in the Atlantic Flyway?

For questions about Canada geese and RPs in the Atlantic Flyway please contact: George Haas
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June 2002

